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ABSTRACT

To learn how basal reading program manuals affect teacher behavior during the time scheduled for reading, classroom observations were made of 16 teachers from first, third, and fifth grade classes. The first grade teachers were observed for a total of 605 minutes; the third grade teachers for 780 minutes; and the fifth grade teachers for 535 minutes. The teachers' instructional methods were then compared with the manuals' recommendations. Researchers met with teachers on the same day that observation took place (whenever possible) and, if appropriate, questions were raised about why no basal materials had been used. At each meeting, teachers were also asked to check on the observer's accuracy in reporting behavior. Results showed that while teachers spent considerable time on post-reading activities recommended by the basal manuals, such as comprehension assessment questions and written practice assignments, they only infrequently followed pre-reading recommendations in presenting new vocabulary, background information, or prereading questions to prepare students for assigned reading. In addition, none of the teachers appeared to be diagnostically oriented. These findings indicate the need to establish priorities in reading instruction so that sufficient time can be allotted to important prereading and diagnostic tasks. (HOD)

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF READING

Reading Education Report No. 44

IS THERE A MATCH BETWEEN WHAT ELEMENTARY TEACHERS DO AND WHAT BASAL READER MANUALS RECOMMEND?

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Is There a Match Between What Elementary Teachers Do and What Basal Reader Manuals Recommend?

Even though observations of elementary school instructional programs consistently reveal the prominent role played by basal materials during the time set aside to teach reading (e.g., Austin & Morrison, 1963; Duffy, 1981; Duffy & McIntyre, 1980; Durkin, 1974, 1974-75, 1978-79; Goodlad & Klein, 1970), no research seems to have been done whose primary objective was to see exactly how and when the activities suggested in basal manuals affect what teachers do. That the time had come to examine the match or mismatch between teacher behavior and manual recommendations was suggested by data from two studies, both concerned with comprehension instruction.

The first was a classroom observation study (Durkin, 1978-79) designed to learn what kind and what amount of comprehension instruction are offered in middle- and upper-grades when reading and social studies are taught. Grades 3-6 were chosen for the observations on the assumption that the major concern in grades 1 and 2 is decoding whereas by grade 3, comprehension begins to receive increased, systematic attention.

Unexpectedly, the 17,997 minutes spent in 39 classrooms in 14 school systems uncovered little comprehension instruction. None at all was offered during social studies and of the 1[illegible]587 minutes spent observing the reading period, comprehension instruction consumed a mere 45 minutes.

The scarcity of such instruction contrasted sharply with the large amount of time spent on comprehension assessment, which was of two kinds. One focused on what students comprehended in basal reader selections, the other on particular comprehension abilities such as recognizing a main

idea or following a sequence of events. Large amounts of the teachers' time also went to giving--and sometimes checking--written assignments, almost all of which involved workbook pages and ditto sheets.

After the data from the classroom observation research were analyzed, it was only natural to wonder why what was seen in all the classrooms was so similar and, more specifically, why so little was done to teach students how to comprehend connected text. Since all the teachers used one or more basal series, examining basal manuals to see what they suggest for promoting comprehension abilities seemed like one way to find answers. Consequently, a second study was begun (Durkin, 1981) in which the manuals of five basal programs from kindergarten through grade 6 were read, word for word. The close analysis revealed that like the observed teachers, the manuals gave far more attention to assessing comprehension than to teaching it. Large numbers of questions about the content of selections in the readers were listed in the manuals; so, too, were many suggestions for assessing particular comprehension abilities. Surprisingly, procedures for the second type of assessment were offered even when the ability being evaluated had not been the goal of earlier instruction.

More numerous than assessment procedures were assignments in the form of workbook and ditto sheet exercises.[1] If teachers do not go beyond what the manuals suggest, students may never see the connection between the exercises and how to become a better reader because the topic of many of the assignments had no connection with selections in the basal reader.

Because of the close correspondence between what was seen in the classrooms and what was found in the manuals, it was tempting to conclude that what the teachers did and did not do was the direct result of what

basal manuals do or do not recommend. However, data supporting a cause-effect relationship were missing, which is why the study described in this report was done. Its purpose was to learn through classroom observations how basal manuals affect teacher behavior during the time scheduled for reading. The more specific concern was: Is there any pattern in, or conscious reasons for, what teachers use, skip, or alter and then use from among the many suggestions in basal manuals? Unlike the two studies that have just been summarized, the focus was not confined to comprehension.

Content of Basal Manuals

Before the procedures that were used to collect data are explained, the kinds of activities covered by the manuals used by the observed teachers (see Table 1) will be described since they served to organize the data.

The core of a basal lesson is a selection in the reader. For each one, manuals summarize the content, identify the new vocabulary, offer suggestions for how to teach the new words, provide background information designed to help students comprehend or perhaps acquire interest in reading the selection, and suggest at least one prereading question.

Following these preparatory activities, the manuals being used by the observed teachers propose that the selection in the reader be read silently. In the early grades, the recommendation is to have children read a page at a time; the teacher is to ask manual-supplied questions about each one. In later grades, larger amounts of a selection would be read without interruption. Again, comprehension assessment questions are

proposed for each part. More questions are listed for use once the entire selection has been read.

For primary grades, the manuals next suggest that the same selection be read aloud. Once more, comprehension questions are suggested for each page of text as well as for a post-reading discussion. Although oral reading is generally recommended less often for later grades, the basal programs used by the teachers in the study continue throughout all the observed grades (grades 1, 3, and 5) to suggest having oral reading after the silent reading. One series in particular gave an unexpected amount of coverage to having older students read aloud, and frequently referred to "oral reading standards" designed to promote expressive oral reading.

The next segment in the manuals deals with skill development. (If a manual suggests that a selection be divided into two or three separate parts to be read on different days, suggestions for skill development appear after each part.) Skill development sections deal with instruction and practice--mostly practice--and cover topics like decoding, word meanings, and comprehension. It is here that references are made to workbook and ditto sheet assignments. The manuals used by the 16 observed teachers also included sections called something like "Providing for Individual Differences." The provisions are more practice exercises that are usually similar to, but easier than, the practice that was part of the earlier skills development segment.

In eight cases, the manuals that figure in the present research were new to the teachers either because they were being used by the school system for the first time during the year of the observations (N = 7), or because the teacher was in her first year of teaching (N = 1). At the

other extreme, one teacher had used the same series in the same grade for 12 years. Of the six series being used, three were in the study of basal manuals referred to earlier (Durkin, 1981). For the present research, two were revised versions with copyright dates of 1981 and 1982.

The Present Study

To learn how manuals function, 16 teachers were observed during the period officially scheduled for reading. To see if the manuals function differently at various grade levels, observations were of first-, third- and fifth-grade classes. Since it was difficult to find teachers who were willing to be observed, it was stressed that the purpose of the visiting was not to make judgments but to learn what parts of manuals are or are not used, and why. Avoiding questions and comments that might appear to be judgmental meant that the teachers' explanations for doing or not doing something had to be accepted at face value even though it was always tempting and sometimes desirable to do some probing.

Observed Teachers

While it would also have been highly desirable to see a basal lesson from beginning to end for each reading group in each class, available time did not permit that. Instead, the observations, which began in February and ended in May, took place on two successive days in each of the classrooms of 15 teachers. In the case of the sixteenth teacher, the two observations were separated by 11 days. (The original plan was to observe five teachers at each of the three grade levels on two successive days. However, in the case of one third-grade teacher, the school closed due to a

late spring snowstorm on what was to be the second day of observing. Because unforeseen circumstances made it seem that a second day could not be scheduled, another third-grade teacher was observed. In the end, a second day was spent in the original teacher's classroom, which is why six third-grade teachers are in the study.) The first-grade teachers were observed for a total of 605 minutes; the third-grade teachers for 780 minutes; and the fifth-grade teachers for 535 minutes.

Information about the teachers is summarized in Table 1. The most unexpected finding for this writer was the scarcity of recent enrollments in reading methodology courses. Since the time when such courses were taken by the 16 teachers is related to when they received their bachelor's degrees, one possible reason for the scarcity is that college and university programs beyond the bachelor's degree commonly shift from methodology courses to courses in diagnosis.

Insert Table 1 about here.

To what extent the data about teaching experiences, degrees held, and how long ago the last methods course was taken make the group of 16 a representative sample of elementary teachers is unknown.

Method for Collecting Data

Data about the match or lack of match between teacher behavior and manual recommendations were collected in the following way. During each observation, this writer recorded what the teacher did. Immediately following the reading period in an area other than the classroom, what the

teacher did was compared with the recommendations in the manual(s) used that day so that each observed activity could be catalogued as (a) followed recommendation, or (b) followed recommendation in altered form (what the manual suggested was noted), or (c) not in manual. What was recommended by the manual but not used was described next in the observation record.

As soon as circumstances permitted, the researcher met on the same day with the teacher in order to make a second comparison and to find out why manual recommendations had been used, altered, or skipped. If appropriate, questions were raised about why nonbasal materials had been used. At each such meeting, the teacher was also asked to check on the observer's accuracy in reporting behavior. In no case was there any discrepancy between what the researcher said the teacher had done and what the teacher remembered doing.

Findings

Whether what was seen in the 16 classrooms matched or did not match what manuals recommended is summarized in Table 2. Before the data are discussed in relation to the nine different headings in the table, brief descriptions of five of the teachers will be presented for three reasons,

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Insert Table 2 about here.

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two of which account for the particular teachers selected. The first reason is that the descriptions should help clarify the content in Table 2. The second is that the descriptions show that the time in a school year when observations are made may have a major effect on what will be seen.

The third reason is that they will point up what a number of researchers (e.g., Brophy & Everton, 1978; Duffy, 1982; Good, 1979; and Shannon, 1982) are now saying directly or indirectly, namely, that findings from classroom observation studies are not as generalizable as researchers would like the data to be because of contextual variables, which can be divided into two groups. The "outer context" includes the social system of each school, the administrator, the board of education, and parents. The "inner context" is composed not only of the instructional materials that are available but also of such variables as the age, ability, and behavior of students, the teacher's philosophy (either consciously or unconsciously developed), and his or her perception of what is required to survive in the classroom.

Descriptions of Five Teachers

The following thumbnail sketches of five teachers in the study clearly underscore the influence of both the inner and outer contexts and, by so doing, show why it is difficult if not impossible to arrive at conclusions about the influence of basal manuals that would be applicable to all teachers in all situations.

Teacher 3.3. This teacher had a third-grade homeroom and was observed while working with 13 third graders and 7 fourth graders, all of whom were said to be "about the same" in reading ability. At the time of the observations (April 16 and 17), the group of 20 was close to finishing a basal reader written for the first semester of third grade.

On the first observation day, Teacher 3.3 immediately explained that "for a while" she was "filling in with extra things" because there were only five more stories in the basal reader and "They had to last until

school closed" (May 26). Asked why the reader could not be finished and the next one in the series begun, Teacher 3.3 said that she had used two readers the previous year but "got into trouble" with other teachers in the building because the children ended the year with partially completed workbooks for the second reader. Since the "filling in" that went on during the two days did not include reading a basal story, what Teacher 3.3 did with manual recommendations for stories could not be determined. How the manual functioned for practice assignments, however, was observed continuously. Because assignments did constitute the whole of what was observed, watching them being given (in all instances, to the whole class) brought into sharp focus some questionable practices regarding written exercises that were common not only in all the classrooms in this study but also in those observed for other research (e.g., Anderson, in press; Duffy, 1981; Durkin, 1974-75; Durkin, 1978-79; Mason, 1983; Mason & Osborn, 1982). For that reason, what Teacher 3.3 did with assignments will be described in some detail.

The initial activity on the first day was a listening exercise that centered on a nonbasal ditto sheet. The teacher told the children to listen to a brief story (actually, a paragraph) that she would read aloud, after which they were to answer questions about it by doing prescribed things with pictures on the ditto sheet. Four paragraphs were read. Following the listening activity, Teacher 3.3 distributed a basal ditto sheet to the entire class, one referred to in the manual section "Providing for Individual Differences." The sheet dealt with figurative language, something to which the teacher never referred. Instead, time went to how to complete the page. Once the figurative language exercise was done,

another basal ditto sheet was distributed, this one dealing with the need to choose appropriate meanings in dictionaries. This ditto, too, was referred to in the section "Providing for Individual Differences." The last ditto sheet used on the first day--one also mentioned in the individual difference section--had the title "Getting Information from Diagrams." The task was to answer questions by examining the content of a picture representing the solar system.

The second day in Teacher 3.3's room started with another listening activity involving a tape from the school system's audiovisual library. It was entitled "Reading-Listening Comprehension Skills: Cause and Effect." Why the children were being asked to listen to the tape was not explained, nor was its theme identified ahead of time. As it turned out, the tape offered simple, interesting explanations of "cause" and "effect," but the narrator related neither to listening nor to reading. Later, when Teacher 3.3 was asked why she used the tape, she said, "It's in our library."

Next came a basal workbook assignment that dealt with recalling details. Although the manual said to assign the page after a certain story was read, it had nothing to do with the story. At the time the assignment was given, the teacher told the children to read the text carefully to themselves, after which they were to answer the multiple-choice questions at the bottom of the page. While they worked, she waited. When everyone seemed to be finished, the teacher listened to answers given orally by the students. If an incorrect answer was offered, another child was called on. This procedure differed from the manual's recommendation to have students indicate the sentences in the text on which they based their answers.

Later, when Teacher 3.3 was asked why the recommendation was ignored, she said she had examined the manual only to see what assignments to give.

Two pages in the basal workbook occupied the class for the rest of the reading period. Both dealt with predicting outcomes, a topic that could have been, but was not, related to the tape heard earlier on cause-effect relationships. In this case, the manual merely said to assign the pages; the teacher, however, had the text read aloud. The reading, which was very poor (difficult to hear, slow and halting) proceeded by having the children take turns reading one sentence each. (Later, the teacher explained what she had chosen to do by saying that she wanted to make sure everyone had a chance to read aloud.) After the two pages were read, the children were directed to answer the multiple-choice questions at the bottom of the sheets. In this case, answers were not checked; instead, the teacher collected the workbooks when she thought everyone had finished. She said she did that because the reading period was coming to an end, and some of the children had to return to their homeroom.

Teacher 5.1. Although Teacher 5.1 was using a manual that recommended that selections in the reader be read silently first, then orally, no general conclusion about her use of the recommendation could be reached for such reasons as the following. During the first observation, a group read a play aloud; during the second, a different group read a play silently. In another instance, a group read the beginning of a story aloud; then, unexpectedly, Teacher 5.1 told them to finish reading it at their desks as she handed out a typed list of manual questions about the story. With a different group and a different selection, her assignment was to read it

silently and to be ready to answer questions about the content the next day. Again, a list of questions taken from the manual was distributed.

Because of the lack of any consistency or pattern in Teacher 5.1's use of silent and oral reading, she was asked about the variety. Her explanation was that she did what she could in the limited time that she had, and that discipline problems--which were apparent on both days--often forced her to change plans abruptly. Never absent from executed plans, however, was the use of every written assignment referred to in the skills development sections of the manual. In this respect, Teacher 5.1 was like all the other teachers with the exception of Teacher 5.5, who had nothing but oral reading on the two days she was observed.

Teacher 5.5. At the very start of the first observation, which took place on May 2, Teacher 5.5 said to the observer, "I know in fifth grade that some teachers teach comprehension, but I have oral reading." Asked why, she explained that she wanted her students "to have confidence as speakers and as readers" and that oral reading was one way to achieve that. (Although it never occurred during the observations, Teacher 5.5 said that her students read silently for five minutes each day, at which time they could read whatever they wanted to read with the exception of comic books.) At the start of the observations, Teacher 5.5 also explained that her class had finished their reader and was now rereading certain selections. The one being reread on May 2 was a legend. Before the oral reading began, the teacher reviewed what a legend is. (At no time during the two days was a manual consulted, which is why no data appear in Table 2 for Teacher 5.5.) Since the oral reading on the first day began at two o'clock and continued until the teacher terminated it at 2:45, the quality of the reading and the

attention given it gradually deteriorated. Probably because so few students were paying attention at 2:45, Teacher 5.5 suddenly brought the one-hour reading period to an end by announcing, "Use the next fifteen minutes to catch up with what's on the board." Assignments for various subjects were listed there.

On the next day, Teacher 5.5 started the reading period by reviewing the part of the legend that had been read the day before. She then said to the class, "To make sure that everyone stays awake today, read just one sentence when it's your turn. We'll go up and down the rows." This directive resulted not only in some unusual oral reading but also in problems whenever a sentence was unexpectedly short. When it was, the student whose turn it was to read next was rarely ready. As a result, the reading of the legend was interrupted periodically with chastisement and reminders to be ready. Although the reading period was scheduled to last an hour, it was again shortened, this time because the legend was finished. Once again, Teacher 5.5 told her students to make sure all assignments for the day were done.

The other two teachers who will be described are discussed together because both relied on parents to do some of what was recommended in the basal manuals they were using.

Teachers 3.6 and 1.4. On the two days that Teacher 3.6 was observed, she did nothing with reading groups but ask manual questions about selections that were to have been read at home the night before, give assignments referred to in the manual, and check some that had been completed. When Teacher 3.6 was asked about the way she spent her time,

she said she sent home new vocabulary each night. (New words were listed on the chalkboard, and the children copied them.) The children were expected to study the words for homework and read the new selection to their parents. When this writer called attention to one boy who obviously had not read a story that was discussed on the second day of observing, Teacher 3.6 said that such behavior was unusual because all the parents were very interested in their children's school work. Asked why she bypassed a manual suggestion for phonics instruction, Teacher 3.6 said that so much time in her school went to phonics from kindergarten through grade 2 that she felt "no big need to work on it."

The dependence of Teacher 1.4 on parental help came to light when this researcher asked why she had selections read orally first even though the manual said to start with silent reading. Teacher 1.4's explanation was, "The children read a new story at home the night before we read it out loud in school." When the researcher asked, "What if they can't read it?" she said that parents were expected to give whatever help was needed.

Later, after the formal research interview was concluded, Teacher 1.4 mentioned that one boy in her room was a Vietnamese refugee whose parents spoke no English and, in the case of another boy, both parents were blind.

The Observed Teachers' Use of Manual Suggestions

What was seen and heard in the 16 classrooms in relation to recommendations in basal manuals is summarized in Table 2. Some elaboration of what is summarized follows.

New vocabulary. All the manuals recommended that new vocabulary be introduced in sentences that they list. As Table 2 shows, only three

teachers used contexts. All the others who did anything with new words (N = 10) wrote them in lists--even function words like from and among--on the board or, in one case, on chart paper. All said that writing contexts consumed too much time.

The two first-grade teachers who followed the recommended procedure used charts supplied by the publisher of the basal program that displayed the sentences appearing in the manual. The one fifth-grade teacher who used contexts had a ditto master from the publisher that also listed the suggested sentences.

Although using contexts sounds like a praiseworthy practice, the observations suggested that it is effective only if the words presumed to be familiar are familiar. But that hardly was the case when contexts were used. As a result, the three teachers who used them spent as much time on words apparently assumed by the publisher to be known as they did on new vocabulary. That both the teachers and the manuals gave too little attention to teaching and practicing new vocabulary showed up whenever oral reading occurred--and, as Table 2 shows, oral reading was a very common activity in the observed classrooms.

Background information. In contrast, not even a minute in any classroom was used to develop or review background information. At a time when the significance of world knowledge for comprehension is receiving widespread attention, the omission was unexpected. It was especially surprising in one third grade because, on the very day that a space shuttle was launched from Florida, the basal story for one reading group was about a flamingo living in Florida who was confused by what he thought was a silo--which, in fact, was a rocket--going up into the sky.

The one time that the importance of background information for comprehension was overtly demonstrated occurred in a fifth grade when a reading group had considerable trouble understanding parts of a story that dealt with a Jewish religious holiday. Even though the manual provided interesting information about it, the teacher bypassed that section.

Why no teacher spent time either activating or adding to their students' knowledge of the world was consistently explained with references to insufficient time to do everything that manuals recommend.

Prereading questions. As Table 2 indicates, posing questions before a selection was read for the first time--either silently or orally--was not common either. In this case, reasons offered for the omission were more varied. Teachers 1.1 and 1.2 said their manuals suggested so many questions that some had to be omitted. Teacher 1.4 explained that young children cannot hold questions in mind while they read, thus it is useless to ask any until the reading is done. Teachers 3.1, 3.2, and 3.4 all said that if they asked questions ahead of time, their students would read only enough to get the answers.

Teachers 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3 used a basal series whose fifth-grade manuals include one question that is to be posed before each selection is read for the first time. On the days of the observations, Teacher 5.3 did not ask the question, but Teachers 5.1 and 5.2 did. Even those who believe that prereading questions promote comprehension might wonder, however, about the wisdom of using the manual questions since they consistently revealed too much about a story's plot. In the case of Teacher 5.1, to cite an example, the manual's suggestion was, "Have them (the students)

read to discover how Ella turned a disappointment into a success." One prereading question that Teacher 5.2 asked appeared in the manual as, "Have them read to see how someone who is weak wins out over someone stronger."

Explanations given by Teachers 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3 for both the use and lack of use of prereading questions were similar and went something like: Sometimes I use them, and sometimes I don't. It depends on the questions and the availability of time. Insufficient time was the reason given by the remaining teachers when they were asked why they ignored a manual's suggestion to ask prereading questions.

Silent reading. As Table 2 points up, silent reading was uncommon in the first grades. The one teacher who followed the manual's suggestion to start with silent reading was a nontenured teacher who explained her close adherence to manual recommendations as follows: "There's little motivation to alter what's recommended in the manual because I don't know what grade--if any--I'll be teaching next year." (This was a teacher who, for three years, had had her contract terminated in the spring and was then rehired the next fall. In the three-year period, she taught three different grades.)

While the third-grade teachers had silent reading more often than did those in first grade, the three who assigned it ignored manual directives to question students after every few pages of text. Instead, the three gave silent reading assignments with directions like "Read the story at your desks, and we'll talk about it tomorrow" or "Read it by tomorrow. Be ready to answer questions." All three teachers explained what they did by saying that since they had to work with another reading group, they could

not supervise the silent reading nor ask questions about the selection until all of it had been read.

What these three third-grade teachers did with silent reading and how they explained what they did were identical to Teacher 5.4's procedures and explanation. In the case of Teacher 5.2, the one difference was her use of a list of manual questions at the time silent reading was assigned. (Written questions were not recommended in the manual.) When distributing one such list, she said to her students, "Here are some questions when you're done." Apparently it was taken for granted that responses would be written because, after doing the assigned reading, the children automatically started to write answers. None looked at the questions before they read, nor did Teacher 5.2 suggest doing that. Why Teacher 5.2 did what she did was explained with the words, "If I don't give them the questions and require written answers, they won't read."

Comprehension assessment questions. Even though no observed teacher asked every comprehension assessment question listed in a manual, and even though only one (Teacher 1.3) used manual questions at the four designated times (during and after silent reading, and during and after oral reading), it is still true that any teacher who asked assessment questions used nothing but manual questions with the exception of Teacher 5.4.[2] In fact, the most apparent and dependent use of manuals occurred in connection with question asking, for it was then that teachers either skimmed a manual and then asked a question or read a question directly from the manual.

Additional information about the use of manual questions is in Table 2. Further explanations of the symbols shown in the two columns pertaining to comprehension assessment questions follow.

A plus sign signifies that manual questions were asked when the manual suggested asking them. For example, Teacher 1.1 had oral reading, and she asked questions both during the reading and afterwards. A triangle indicates that manual questions were used but not in the recommended sequence. In every case where a triangle is found, the teacher posed assessment questions after the whole of a selection had been read but not while it was being read. The squares in Table 2 mean that manual questions were presented to students in writing. Why written questions were used and written answers required was explained as follows: (1) When questions are posed orally, certain children dominate the discussion, making it impossible to know what the more quiet ones comprehended. (2) Some children would not read were they not held responsible for turning in written answers. (3) Workbook and ditto-sheet exercises only require short answers, or circling or underlining something; consequently, they provide no practice in composing sentences.

Oral reading. Why so much time went to oral reading was also explained in a variety of ways. Some teachers said that they used it to see if their students remembered new words; none, however, took notes on who missed which words--and many were missed whenever oral reading took place--nor was anything ever done with frequently missed words after the oral reading was finished. Another teacher said that she had oral reading as a way of checking up on comprehension, which was an unexpected

explanation because on the previous day the children showed excellent understanding when discussing the selection after reading it silently. Still another teacher said that she had oral reading because she wanted her students "to be able to read with expression and with rhythm." It was in this teacher's third-grade classroom that an expository piece about dinosaurs was read with an amount of expression that only a very exciting tale would warrant.

Instruction. The column in Table 2 headed "Practice Assignments" indicates that for all the observations (with the exception of those of Teacher 5.5), the parts of manuals that deal with skill development (instruction and practice) were used. However, as the column of data for instruction points up, instructional procedures were far less common than suggestions for practice.

Why Teacher 3.6 bypassed a manual suggestion for phonics instruction was explained earlier; why Teacher 3.1 said she omitted a procedure for comprehension instruction will be explained now.

It was in Teacher 3.1's room that a group read aloud the expository selection about dinosaurs. In the selection, expressions indicating that opinions were being offered occurred frequently--for instance, "Some claim that . . .," "It is thought by some that . . .," and so on. A post-reading segment in the manual directed the teacher to have students return to the text so that the significance of such expressions could be clarified. Teacher 3.1 did not do that, however, later explaining the omission by saying that the manual had already done so much with signal words for opinion that there was no need to do anything further. Since this writer's study of basal manuals (Durkin, 1981) uncovered much

repetition within each manual, the explanation seemed reasonable. What seemed contradictory was that a few minutes later, Teacher 3.1 gave every practice assignment referred to in the manual including a ditto sheet exercise dealing with signal words for opinion. Asked why all the manual's suggestions for written practice were followed--each went along with a workbook page or ditto sheet--Teacher 3.1 referred to the two reasons always given for written exercises: Children need practice and, in addition, they need to be occupied to allow for instruction with other groups. (With the exception of Teachers 3.3 and 5.5, all the observed teachers had either two or three reading groups.)

As Table 2 shows, the instruction that was seen during the observations had to do with phonics. Comments about what was seen will be made now.

While the goals of the phonics instruction in the classrooms of Teachers 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 3.1, and 3.2 matched the goals of the instructional procedures in their manuals, none used the procedures themselves. Contrary to manual recommendations, all identified consonant and vowel sounds apart from words. Explanations for the direct, explicit identifications were similar--for instance, "Children need to hear the sounds," and "That's how they hear it (speech sound) best." Teachers 1.1 and 1.2 also rejected their manuals' illustrative words in which the vowel sound being taught appeared in medial position. Instead, both teachers used words that began with the vowel sounds they were teaching.

When the others (Teachers 1.5 and 3.5) were asked why they bypassed manual proposals for phonics instruction, both said that they taught

phonics to the whole class in the afternoon from phonics workbook series published by two nonbasal companies, both of which identified sounds explicitly apart from words. (Teacher 1.5 said that she had always used the workbooks because they did a better job than basals. Teacher 3.5 explained it was the policy of her school to teach phonics separately with the workbooks.) Like the other six teachers who did not abide by manual recommendations for teaching phonics, these two used all the basal workbook pages and ditto sheets that pertained to that topic.

The differences between what the eight teachers did with phonics and what the basal manuals they were using recommended could not help but bring to mind Chall's well-known and highly influential book, Learning to Read: The Great Debate (1967), since her conclusions about what was being done with phonics were based on what manuals proposed rather than on observations of classrooms.

Practice assignments. As has been mentioned, all the written practice referred to in skill development sections was assigned by the 15 teachers who used manuals while being observed. All such assignments consisted of workbook pages and ditto sheet exercises. (Teachers 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4 assigned other practice sheets that were supplied by the publisher of the basal series but not referred to in the manuals.) Even though assignments were exceedingly common, none of the 15 teachers ever referred to a manual while giving them, which contrasted with the open display of manuals when comprehension assessment questions were asked. All the teachers explained afterwards that they checked the manuals ahead of time to see which workbook pages to assign and which ditto masters needed to be

duplicated. None of the observations yielded evidence of assignments being made on the basis of needs.

The use of every practice page mentioned in the manuals resulted not only in numerous assignments but also in assignments having two characteristics identified in the earlier study of basal manuals (Durkin, 1981). One characteristic was the lack of relationship among the assignments, which can be illustrated by one series of assignments that Teacher 3.2 gave that dealt, in turn, with exaggeration, multiple meanings of words, bar graphs, medial vowel sounds, and main ideas. The second common characteristic was the lack of relationship between the topic or content of an assignment and the selection that had just been read. Following the expository piece about dinosaurs, for example, one assignment had to do with nicknames. In another manual, an assignment focusing on a map of South America followed a selection that told of a secret meeting held in Boston just prior to the start of the Revolutionary War.

Four of the fifth-grade teachers volunteered criticism of the lack of coordination between selections in the readers and the topics of workbook and ditto sheet exercises. One series--referred to as B in Table 1--was consistently criticized because its workbook for fifth grade dealt repeatedly with topics taught in the language arts textbook (e.g., punctuation and quotation marks). In spite of the complaints, pages dealing with such topics were still assigned.

It can at least be conjectured that the nature of many of the basal assignments encouraged the observed teachers to deal with them in ways that duplicated what was seen in the classroom observation research referred to

earlier (Durkin, 1978-79). More specifically, 15 teachers in the present study:

(1) Never explained why any assignment was being given.

(2) Went over an assignment only if the written directions were unclear or if the format of the assignment was different from any used before.

(3) Never explained how the topic of an assignment and the ability to read were related.

(4) Seemed most concerned that students finish assignments and get right answers.

As was pointed out earlier, the two reasons cited by the 15 teachers for all the assignments that they gave had to do with the need for practice and the need to keep children occupied so as to allow for work with an instructional group. The use of assignments as a means for keeping children busy might also help to account for the way the teachers handled them.

What was done with written assignments has also been found in classroom observation studies carried out by other researchers. Anderson (in press), for example, reached the following conclusions:

> Presentation or explanations of assignments seldom included statements about content-related purposes of the work (e.g., references to what will be learned or practiced) . . . .
>
> . . . teacher explanations were usually procedural (e.g., "Read the sentence and circle the word that goes in the blank.") . . . .

> Most recorded instances of teacher feedback to seatwork included statements about correctness or neatness . . . .

Combined, all these data suggest that doing practice assignments is probably much less valuable for advancing reading ability than something ought to be when it consumes such large amounts of time.

Provisions for individual differences. As was pointed out earlier in the report, all the manuals used by the observed teachers included a section called something like "Providing for Individual Differences." As was also explained, such sections are composed of further suggestions for practice that is usually similar to, but easier than, the practice referred to in skills development segments. How Teacher 3.3 used the extra practice with her whole class has already been described. The only other teacher who used this section of a manual was Teacher 1.5. For most of the second observation in her room, some of the extra practice was assigned to the whole class. Asked why this had been done, Teacher 1.5 said that her present class was slower than others she had had and that the additional practice was required. What was observed, however, did not support the explanation since, for every assignment, the same children always finished before the others. One result was consistent behavior problems. Although Teacher 1.5 had taught for 30 years, both she and Teacher 5.1 had obvious problems in managing their classrooms.

Summary and Discussion

What was seen in the classrooms of 15 teachers will be summarized and discussed in the form of answers to questions that guided the study.[3] What needs to be kept in mind are the limitations of the study (e.g., relatively

few teachers observed for relatively brief amounts of time). Not to be overlooked, on the other hand, is the close correspondence between what was seen in the present study and what has been reported by other observers of classrooms.

Is There Any Pattern in What is Used, Skipped, or Altered and Then Used from Among Manual Recommendations?

One overall pattern lies in the minor influence of recommendations for pre-reading activities and the major influence of post-reading recommendations. Described specifically, the pattern means that little or no time went to new vocabulary, background information, or pre-reading questions, whereas considerable attention went to comprehension assessment questions and written practice assignments.

Another, more particular pattern emerged for the comprehension assessment questions. Although no teacher used all that were in their manuals, none, either, used anything but manual questions with the exception of Teacher 5.4. The influence of manual suggestions for when to pose assessment questions was mixed. Of the six teachers who had silent reading during an observation, one adhered to the recommendation to ask questions both during the reading and afterwards, whereas all the others only asked post-reading questions. In contrast, whenever oral reading took place--and it occurred in 11 classrooms--comprehension assessment questions were consistently posed both during and after the reading.

As Table 2 shows, the only instruction offered during the observations had to do with phonics. (One manual suggestion for

comprehension instruction and one for phonics were bypassed by two third-grade teachers. No other suggestions for instruction were in the skill development segments being used during the observations.) Even though the phonics instruction that was seen went contrary to manual recommendations since the teachers isolated sounds from words and identified them directly, the phonics goals stated in the manuals were the ones that received attention. The same teachers also gave whatever practice assignments were recommended in their manuals for phonics, each of which was a workbook page or ditto sheet exercise.

As has been pointed out, the most apparent and widespread pattern was the generous use of written practice assignments. Not only was every assignment referred to in the skill development segments used, but others were given as well. Four first-grade teachers assigned practice sheets supplied by the basal publishers that were not mentioned in the manuals. In addition, one first-grade teacher and one at the third-grade level assigned practice exercises referred to in the section of their manuals suggesting help for accommodating individual differences. In both cases, the assignments were given to the whole class.

The fact that workbook and ditto sheet assignments are numerous, and thus time consuming, has been a common conclusion in classroom observation research. In one study, for example, students spent as much as 70 percent of the time allocated to reading doing such assignments (Fisher, et al., 1978). In another (Anderson, in press), "30 per cent to 60 per cent of the students' time was spent on doing some form of seatwork." When the amount of time given to practice assignments is placed in juxtaposition with the

flaws that Osborn (1981) found in her analysis of workbook and ditto-sheet exercises, a question must certainly be raised about this use of students' time as well as about the quality of practice materials that publishers of basal programs provide.

Are There Differences in the Way Manuals Function at Different Grade Levels?

Since similarities across the three grade levels were more characteristic than differences, the former will be discussed first.

One very apparent similarity has already been described: little attention went to preparing students to do assigned reading. The scarcity of preparation was also found in a classroom study by Mason (1983) in which the sequence of activities during the reading period was the concern. Assuming the core of the activities is composed of introducing, reading, and discussing a selection in the basal reader, Mason reported that "Unexpectedly, there were only 5 instances from 110 lessons in 60 reading periods" of an unbroken sequence of the three core components (p. 909). In 11 instances, introducing and reading a text followed each other; on 22 occasions, the sequence of reading and discussing was found. In all other instances, the core components were either missing or "were disconnected by assignments" (p. 911).

This latter finding should hardly come as a surprise to readers of the present report, since another obvious similarity across the three observed grades was a generous use of written assignments. In the present study, one difference was that third- and fifth-grade teachers sometimes wrote assignments on the board, whereas in the first grades they were given

orally by the teacher. Even though none of the first-grade teachers ever dealt explicitly with the topic of an assignment (with the exception of phonics), or with how it related to becoming a better reader, writing assignments does make it less likely that anything will be done to highlight their relevance or purpose.

A third similarity across the three grade levels was the large number of comprehension assessment questions that were asked. Also similar was what appeared to be a greater concern on the part of the teachers for whether answers were right or wrong than for what responses--right or wrong--might reveal about comprehension abilities. This conclusion about the time spent on questioning students is prompted by the fact that whenever a correct answer was given, the next question was asked. If a wrong answer was offered, other children were called on until somebody came up with the right answer. Then another question was asked.

What was observed when comprehension was being assessed, combined with an indiscriminant use of written assignments, suggests one other similarity among the observed teachers: None appeared to be diagnostically oriented. That is, none seemed to look for evidence of instructional needs which, presumably, they would then meet with appropriate instruction and practice. Instead, as Duffy (1981) has suggested, they moved their students through materials in a way that indicated they were more concerned about "a smooth flow of activities" than about learning who knows what and then doing something about what was missing. In another study, after observing other teachers, Duffy and McIntyre (1980) concluded that ". . . there is very little evidence that any of the teachers taught anything about reading by first determining that students do not know how to do it and then planning

a lesson to teach it. Instead, episode after episode revealed teachers' asking students to recite answers to workbook pages and to questions regarding the happenings in basal text stories as if students ought to already know how to read" (p. 8).

Why Do Teachers Use or Not Use Manual Recommendations?

Although it is generally believed that a close match exists between basal manual suggestions and teacher behavior, the present study identified a number of times when teachers did not adhere to the manuals' suggestions. Consequently, why they said they did not use some will be treated first.

Whenever a manual recommendation was bypassed, the two common explanations for the omission referred to time constraints and the lack of importance of what was being suggested. Ideally, these two reasons would be connected. That is, since teachers do not have time to do everything manuals recommend, they would give what time they do have to what is most important for advancing reading ability. Such use of time, of course, requires teachers to have priorities about what is important. Whether the observed teachers had priorities was not revealed in the study. What was learned, however, at least suggests not only that priorities were missing (or at least not used) but also that what contributes to the management and control of a class is assigned as much importance as what helps its members become better readers.

To be more specific, if such priorities had been established (consciously or unconsciously), would so little time have gone to new vocabulary and no time at all to developing background information for what was to be read? Or, for instance, would teachers with clearly articulated

priorities say that they have oral reading "to get problems out in the open" and then do nothing about such obvious ones as limited sight vocabularies? Or, to cite another example, would they say that time was being spent on oral reading in order to check on comprehension when, in fact, the group doing the oral reading had already displayed excellent understanding of the selection after reading it silently?

Based on what was seen in the observed classrooms, it can at least be conjectured that the large amount of oral reading that occurred at the three grade levels was as much a device for controlling students as it was for teaching them. The same motive applies with greater certainty to all the time given to practice assignments; for, in this case, all the teachers said that one reason for the assignments was to keep students occupied. Why written answers to comprehension assessment questions were sometimes required was also explained in a way that linked them with concerns about classroom management--for instance, "If I don't require written answers, they'll never do the reading."

While anyone who has taught elementary school cannot help but appreciate teachers' concerns about management and the possible development of behavior problems, findings in the present study indicate the need for priorities concerning what is important for reading so that what is <u>most</u> important can be worked on in ways that will also allow teachers to manage a class successfully. Giving more time to new vocabulary, background information, pre-reading questions, instruction on essential topics, and better but fewer assignments; and, on the other hand, spending less time on oral reading and comprehension assessment questions is one possible change

that is not likely to promote any more problems than were seen in the classrooms. What the different allotment of time may promote, however, is better readers.

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Footnotes

[1]As will be seen later, examining manuals to learn about the number of times references are made to practice underestimates the quantity because some practice sheets supplied by publishers of basal programs are not mentioned in their manuals.

[2]Teacher 5.4 said she consulted the manual only to see what new vocabulary was in a selection and what written assignments to give. She also explained that she had a selection read silently, after which she and an instructional group discussed it without any pre-planned questions.

[3]Teacher 5.5 is not considered in the summary since she never consulted a manual while being observed.

Table 1

Information About the Observed Teachers

Teacher	School System	Basal Series and Copyright Date	Years of Teaching Experience*	Years at Present Grade Level*	Highest Degree Held**	Most Recent Reading Methods Course
1.1	1	A (1969)	6	2	B.	14 yrs. ago
1.2	1	A (1969)	15	12	B.	16 yrs. ago
1.3	2	B (1981)	3	1	B.	4 yrs. ago
1.4	2	B (1981)	5.5	4	M.	4 yrs. ago
1.5	3	C (1979)	30	25	M.	16 yrs. ago
3.1	1	A (1969)	6	2	B.	7 yrs. ago
3.2	1	A (1969)	5	5	B.	6 yrs. ago
3.3	3	C (1979)	4	3	B.	5 yrs. ago
3.4	2	B (1981)	2	1	B.	3 yrs. ago
3.5	4	D (1977)	4	3	B.	5 yrs. ago
3.6	5	E (1978)	1	1	B.	2 yrs. ago
5.1	2	B (1981)	10	4	M.	12 yrs. ago
5.2	2	B (1981)	10	2	M.	5 yrs. ago
5.3	2	B (1981) F (1980)	8	2	B.	6 yrs. ago
5.4	2	A (1982)	19	2	A.C.	20 yrs. ago
5.5	5	E (1978)	8	2	B.	3 yrs. ago

*Includes year in which observations took place.

**B = Bachelor's Degree; M = Master's Degree; A.C. = Advanced Certificate.

Table 2

Teachers' Responses to Basal Manual Suggestions

Teacher	New Vocabulary in Contexts	Background Information	Pre-Reading Question(s)	Silent Reading	Comprehension Assessment Questions	Oral Reading	Comprehension Assessment Questions	Instruction	Practice Assignments	Individual Differences (Extra Practice)
1.1	□	--	--	--	--	+	+	□ Ph.	+	○
1.2	□	--	--	--	--	+	+	□ Ph.	+	○
1.3	+	--	--	+	+	+	+	□ Ph.	+	○
1.4	+	--	--	--	--	+	+	□ Ph.	+	○
1.5	□	--	--	--	--	+	+	--Ph.	+	+
3.1	□	--	--	□	△	+	+	□ Ph. -- C.	△	○
3.2	□	--	--	□	△	+	+	□ Ph.	△	○
3.3	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	△ □	△ □
3.4	□	--	--	□	△	+	+	○	△	○
3.5	□	--	--	--	--	+	+	--Ph.	+	○
3.6	○	○	○	○	○	○	+	--Ph.	+	○
5.1*	□	--	+		□ △		□	○	+	○
5.2	□	--	+	□	□ △	+	+	○	+	○
5.3**	+	--	--	--	--	+	+	○	+	○
5.4	□	--	--	□	--	--	--	○	+ □	○
5.5***										

*No apparent pattern in her use of silent and oral reading.
**Used manual only with low achievers.
*** Had completed reader. Selection was being reread orally. Manual not consulted.

Key:
+ Used
-- Not used
□ Used in altered form
△ Used in different sequence
○ Not in parts of manuals used during observation
Ph phonics
C comprehension